

WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT

(A FREE TRANSLATION OF *LA MUJER POR FUERZA*)

by

TIRSO DE MOLINA

English translation and adaptation by

JOSÉ MARÍA RUANO DE LA HAZA

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

FINEA, a Hungarian lady

FABIO, her servant

ALBERTO, a Hungarian gentleman, Finea's brother

LUSIDORO, his friend.

COUNT FEDERICO, a Neapolitan gentleman

CLARÍN, his servant

FLORELA, a Neapolitan lady

FELISA, her servant

FENISA

KING OF NAPLES

MARQUIS LUDOVICO

NOTE: Spanish 17th-c. plays were written to be staged on a bare stage platform backed by a 'tiring house covered with curtains. If props were needed, such as a king's throne, a table or some chairs, they were either brought out on to the stage, or revealed at the back by opening the 'tiring house curtain.

SCENE ONE

Enter Finea and her servant, Fabio.

FABIO. Imprudent! Most imprudent!

FINEA. You don't know the first thing about love.

FABIO. But your love is for a man who is about to return to his country and hasn't set eyes on you!

FINEA. True; he's never seen me. But that's because my brother feared what, by keeping me away from him, actually happened. Listen to me, Fabio. How can I make you understand my feelings, my passion, my fondness for this man? Since he arrived three days ago from Naples and, through the holes of my lattice window, I caught a glimpse of his male charms, I've lost my sleep and my appetite. Secretly, I've watched him everyday he's been our guest, from the moment he got up in the morning until, after dining with my brother, he retired at night. And I fell in love with him, Fabio, I did. I couldn't help it. And now I can't bear the thought of being separated from him. That's why I am determined to follow him . . . to his home or to the ends of the Earth, if necessary. And eventually I'll marry him. You'll see. Whether he likes it or not. How I'll manage it, I don't know yet. For now, my plan is to disguise myself as a man, follow him to Naples, and with a bit of luck, become a page at Court, where I'm bound to bump into him. After that, I'll think of something, anything, to make him fall in love me. And don't you try to dissuade me! It's too late. I'm a woman in love and I'll do whatever it takes to get my man!

FABIO. And is it part of your scheme that I should accompany you?

FINEA. Of course! That's why I told you the whole thing. But, quick! Here they come. He's leaving! I can't stand it! I'll get ready. Wait for me here.

Exit Finea and enter Alberto and Federico and Clarín.

ALBERTO. My dear Federico, His Majesty, whom God may preserve, entrusted you to my care; but I'm afraid I've proved to be an abject failure. I've been a terrible host.

FEDERICO. Far from it, Alberto. I wish I could return the favour and look after you in my house in Naples as lavishly and generously as you've entertained me in yours. To add to my happiness, my mission in Hungary, as my King's ambassador, has been a success and sweet peace has been restored to both our countries. What else could I wish for? Well, one more thing, actually . . . I have been told that you have a sister and am very sorry not to have had the opportunity to meet her. For I assure you that, had I seen her, I would have returned to Naples a married man.

ALBERTO. Finea loves her solitude and that's the reason you've not had the chance to make her acquaintance. But I'm exceedingly grateful to you for even considering the possibility of marrying her.

FEDERICO. Well, I repeat: I regret not having met her.

ALBERTO. It's a great honour for me to have been of use to you.

FEDERICO. Alberto, I'll write to you as soon as I arrive in Naples.

ALBERTO. I wish you Godspeed. Please, let me accompany you to your carriage.

FEDERICO. Please, don't. For then I'll feel obliged to accompany you back to your house. And then you'll insist in accompanying me again to my carriage, and I, back to the house And so on ad infinitum.

ALBERTO. Very well then. Shall we proceed? It's getting late.

FEDERICO. But you will remain here.

ALBERTO. I wish to be of service until the very end.

FEDERICO. Alberto, farewell.

Exeunt Federico and Clarín.

ALBERTO. That's a true gentleman!

FABIO. Everyone here agrees. He's lavished handsome presents on all your servants.

ALBERTO. That's the way a gentleman shows his gratitude.

FABIO. My lady Finea, your sister, could do worse than marry such a man.

ALBERTO. I did not want him to see her precisely because I knew he'd feel obliged to make such an offer. I know how courteous Neapolitan noblemen can be!

FABIO. But if he liked her...

ALBERTO. We shall see... I'm not in principle opposed to the idea.

FABIO. Why don't you write to him?

ALBERTO. First, he'll have to write to me reiterating his desire to marry my sister. The offer he's just made was prompted solely by his good manners and the rules of courtesy. He shouldn't feel obliged to marry her just because I've been a good host. Not every grateful guest is going to return to his country newly wed. When he writes, we'll know if he's serious about it.

SCENE TWO

Enter Federico and Clarín, his servant, arguing.

FEDERICO. That's enough, Clarín! I'm tired of this argument.

CLARÍN. But aren't you in love with Florela? Haven't you been courting her for a long time?

FEDERICO. I am and I have.

CLARÍN. Then, why on earth would you tell Alberto you'd marry his sister, a woman you've never seen?

FEDERICO. Have I lost anything by my proposal?

CLARÍN. If he hadn't replied like the true friend he is, what would your state be now?

FEDERICO. Married.

CLARÍN. Are you joking?

FEDERICO. Of course I am. My offer to marry his sister was only a mark of courtesy. He understood it as such. Besides, even if his sister were as beautiful as an angel, I love Florela and I would not have accepted to wed the King of Hungary's daughter, had His Majesty offered me her hand in marriage.

CLARÍN. I think a gentleman could out of gratitude lend his house, his horses, his birds, his books, his servants even, to another man, but to offer to marry a woman who for all you know could be as ugly as sin surpasseth all understanding.

FEDERICO. You're right. It was a bit reckless of me.

CLARÍN. If Florela were a jealous woman, you'd be in big trouble, sir.

FEDERICO. All right. That's enough. Don't berate me any more. I'll more careful next time.

CLARÍN. You better be. Or you'll end up married to the daughter of the next innkeeper we meet.

FEDERICO. Hold your tongue! Someone's coming.

Enter Finea in men's clothing and Fabio.

FINEA. Good morning, my lord!

FEDERICO. Good morning to you, young man! What brings you here?

FINEA. As you can see by our clothes, we both hail from Hungary.

FEDERICO. And where are you heading now?

FINEA. Italy, my lord.

FEDERICO. What city?

FINEA. Naples.

FEDERICO. Ah, what a coincidence! That happens to be my city and I'm on my way there. We're in a hurry, but you're welcome to travel with us, if you wish.

FINEA. It will be an honour, my lord.

FEDERICO. Very well then. I am Count Federico.

FINEA. Your humble servant.

FEDERICO. And what, may I ask, takes you to Naples?

FINEA. Ill fortune, sir, which I'm hoping will change by changing countries.

FEDERICO. I'm sorry to hear that's what brings you to Italy.

FINEA. Forgive my boldness, sir, but it would be my greatest joy and pleasure to enter your country as your servant, my gracious lord.

FEDERICO. Consider it done. From this moment you'll enjoy my protection as a member of my household.

FINEA. My lord, this exceeds the boundaries of the most exquisite courtesy.

FEDERICO. Your name?

FINEA. Celio, sir.

FEDERICO. And who's that accompanying you?

FINEA. An old servant, my lord, who will henceforth be yours as well.

FEDERICO. Well, my good fellow, my house awaits you too.

FABIO. At your service, my lord.

FEDERICO. Clarín, make sure they're looked after and then let's get ready to resume our journey.

Exit Federico.

CLARÍN. Well, Celio, you've landed on your feet! My lord the Count is very kind and generous to his servants.

FINEA. I can see he's the flower of chivalry.

CLARÍN. That he is! Only today, the silly man nearly fell into a trap. He's such a courteous gentleman that, grateful to his host, he offered to marry his sister!

FINEA. I bet he saw her and fell instantly in love.

CLARÍN. No! He never even clapped eyes on her. Her brother must be the jealous type. He kept her hidden from us. She's probably quite a floozy!

FINEA. I am sure she is. Like all women. So, he's unmarried then.

CLARÍN. Unmarried, but I suspect not for long. He's in love with a beautiful lady, who loves him too.

FINEA. She lives in Naples?

CLARÍN. That's right.

FINEA. Her name?

CLARÍN. Florela. And I have the feeling you're going to get to know her quite well. You see, until now I was their go-between, bringing little secret notes, and arranging little secret meetings, but I think you'll prove far more adept at that business than I am, and will soon take over the job, with my blessings.

Exit Clarín.

FABIO. I'm afraid to ask what you're planning to do next.

FINEA. This is a serious setback, Fabio. But one never knows what Fortune has in store for us, especially if (*with a wink*) I give it a nudge in the right direction.

SCENE THREE

Enter Florela and Felisa, her servant.

FELISA. Read his letter and you'll know the exact date he left Hungary.

FLORELA. I can't stand his absence, Felisa. I love him so!

FELISA. The Count is not to be blamed. Blame the King, who honours him with these embassies.

FLORELA. I don't blame him, although I suppose he could've refused to go.

FELISA. No, he could not. But I'm sure he'll be back before you know it. Break the seal and find out exactly when.

FLORELA. I don't dare to. Just in case it's the bearer of bad news.

FELISA. What bad news?

FLORELA. Maybe he met someone...

FELISA. Nonsense.

FLORELA. (*Opens the letter and reads:*) "My beautiful Florela, I write full of sorrow, and unhappiness! I fear and live in uncertainty and dread! Will I find you as constant in your love as when I left? Have you forgotten me already? I must return swiftly to you to find out what my fate will be: either to live, if you still love me; or to die, if you have found someone else."

FELISA. Well, what now?

FLORELA. Now. . . Now I am happy.

SCENE FOUR

Enter King of Naples and Ludovico.

KING. Let us rejoice. Peace has been restored.

LUDOVICO. All credit belongs to Your Majesty.

KING. I see by Federico's letter that the King of Hungary is also very pleased with the outcome of the negotiations.

LUDOVICO. Federico succeeded beyond all expectations.

KING. I presume he's well aware of the importance of keeping the marriage arrangements secret.

LUDOVICO. He certainly is. But you may ask him yourself, since I see him approaching.

Enter Federico, Finea and Clarín.

FEDERICO. (*bowing*) Your Majesty.

KING. Welcome back to Naples, Count. Did you bring letters from His Majesty, the King of Hungary?

FEDERICO. Yes, Your Highness. I have the honour of delivering them to you personally.

KING. I shall retire to read them.

Exit the King.

LUDOVICO. You should expect a rich reward for your services, Count.

FEDERICO. My reward is to have been of service to my country.

Exit Ludovico.

CLARÍN. Well, the greater business is done!

FEDERICO. Rather, Clarín, the lesser. My sense of duty obliged me to attend to the King's business before turning my attention to the love of my life, Florela. But now that I am free to go and see her, I shall not delay a minute!

CLARÍN. Wait a second, sir. The King is bound to reward your service handsomely. Wouldn't it be wise to postpone your wedding to Florela until you know what he has in mind for you?

FEDERICO. How can you possibly entertain such an idea? Even if the King were to reward my services with the hand of a princess, I would not betray my angel, my Florela.

CLARÍN. It could be to your advantage to do so.

FEDERICO. I could never contemplate such a base act! Her beauty is without compare! Celio, what say you?

FINEA. Sir, as I do not know the lady, I shall remain silent.

FEDERICO. Ah! When you see that goddess of virtue, you'll have something to say. I will take you to Florela. I want you, rather than this fool, to become henceforth the secretary of my soul. I will disclose my innermost thoughts and feelings to you, and to you alone.

Exit Federico.

CLARÍN. Well what do you think of our Pyramus?

FINEA. That he's a man and he desires a woman. Is she really that beautiful?

CLARÍN. Yes.

FINEA. Of noble blood?

CLARÍN. As noble as his.

FINEA. Well, if she is suitable and he loves her, why wait?

CLARÍN. He errs in not finding out first how the King plans to reward him. Maybe he will get an even bigger prize.

FINEA. You are indeed a fool. Royalty don't marry their vassals. But enough about our master. Let's talk about things that matter. What does one do here in Naples for fun? You know what I mean.

CLARÍN. Well, I know these two girls, you see? And I fancy one of them. But I fear your. . .

FINEA. My what?

CLARÍN. Well... I look at you and...

FINEA. What do you see?

CLARÍN. A handsome guy. And the girl I fancy is as changeable as a weather vane.

FINEA. Nonsense! Where true love reigns, no change is possible!

CLARÍN. It's evident you don't know women, as is to be expected from a beardless youth like yourself. But I have decided to trust you. Come with me, and you'll meet two floozies wicked enough to please the Devil himself.

FINEA. I don't like you calling them names.

CLARÍN. What do you want me to call them? Princesses?

FINEA. Women deserve respect.

CLARÍN. You'll change your mind when you meet these two!

SCENE FIVE

Enter Florela and Federico.

FLORELA. My love! You've come back to me!

FEDERICO. My life! How I've longed for you!

FLORELA. I missed you every day!

FEDERICO. That makes me so happy!

FLORELA. But did you miss me?

FEDERICO. Every single minute I was away from you!

FLORELA. Can I believe you? What about those Hungarian ladies? Did they accost you, pursue you, try to seduce you? I want to know everything. Don't hide anything from me.

FEDERICO. How could you think such a thing of me?

FLORELA. I am consumed by jealousy.

FEDERICO. Well, unconsume yourself, my darling! Remember: I don't speak a word of Hungarian. When a lady spoke to me I had no idea what she was saying. And neither did she, when I responded in Italian.

FLORELA. There are many ways a wily woman can communicate her cravings! Did any of them offer you a flower, a handwritten note, a ribbon? If not in the palace, where such things may appear unseemly, perhaps in your host's residence?

FEDERICO. Florela, I swear to you, I didn't even see Alberto's sister. But here are my two servants. They'll confirm what I just said.

Enter Clarín and Finea.

FEDERICO. Clarín, please tell Florela whether I saw my Hungarian host's sister for even one second during my sojourn.

CLARÍN. Not even for a fraction of a second, my lady. It seems her brother had her locked up in a cell.

FLORELA. Can I believe him? I know what he's like and I don't trust him. What about him?
(pointing at Finea).

FEDERICO. He's my new page. I found him on the road, outside Buda or Pest, I can't remember which.

FLORELA. And can he inform me? He seems honest. And he has beautiful eyes.

FINEA. Yes, my lady. I saw the Count while he was in Hungary.

FLORELA. And do you know what he was up to?

FINEA. Do I have the face of a liar, my lady?

FLORELA. No. Such a handsome face surely cannot tell untruths.

CLARÍN. Madam, my master went to Hungary on very serious business, not to flirt with ladies. I was always at his side and I constantly heard him lament your absence.

FLORELA. I told you I don't believe a word you say.

FEDERICO. Then, believe my pledges.

FLORELA. What pledges?

FEDERICO. May I never see your beautiful eyes again, if I ever thought of another woman while I was in the king's palace or in my host's abode!

FLORELA. Stop! How do you dare pledge my eyes?

FEDERICO. Celio, please tell her whether the risk of losing those dazzling eyes would not be punishment enough for any man?

FINEA. Sir, I cannot properly answer your question until I've examined them closely.

FLORELA. Do you wish to examine my eyes?

FINEA. I wish to assess their beauty, my lady, so as to ascertain whether the Count's sincere or not. (*looks closely into her eyes*). By Jove, his must be a very serious pledge! I can see heaven in your eyes and two tiny suns sparkling in your pupils. Madam, take it from me: you may believe the Count.

FLORELA. Thanks to Celio I believe you, Federico. Come with me now. Night is falling and the music of the fountains beckons with its charming harmonies. I'll tell you what my plans are.

FEDERICO. If they concern our marriage, the sooner the better. (*to Clarín and Celio*) You may leave us now.

Exeunt Federico and Florela.

CLARÍN. Celio, our girls await us. Let's go.

SCENE SIX

Enter the King of Naples and Ludovico.

KING. That's my greatest sorrow, Ludovico.

LUDOVICO. It seems unworthy of Federico.

KING. But the letter leaves no room for doubt. The proof is here.

LUDOVICO. Why don't we see the Count? Let's hear him out.

KING. Very well. Summon him to my presence.

Ludovico goes out and returns with Federico.

FEDERICO. Your Majesty...

KING. Federico. The King of Hungary is making serious allegations against you in this letter. And that's not all. There's a second letter, and its author labels you a traitor and feels so aggrieved by you that he calls you unprincipled and says that you should be tortured and put to death.

FEDERICO. Sir, I do not understand.

KING. What shall I do if, on the one hand, you offend a sovereign, and, on the other, you kidnap your host's sister?

FEDERICO. Me? Kidnap?... what sister?

KING. (*hands him the letters*) You may see for yourself.

FEDERICO. (*Reads*) "Alberto, my chamberlain, by royal command, offered food and lodging in his house to your ambassador, Count Federico. And in return for his hospitality, the said Count Federico saw fit to kidnap Alberto's sister. I trust that Your Highness will find a way to remedy this disgraceful state of affairs. It seems to me that the most expedient solution is to have them wed immediately, so as to prevent Alberto from trying to restore his lost honour by spilling blood."

Federico laughs.

KING. Is this letter from the King of Hungary cause for merriment?

FEDERICO. Your Majesty, how can I not laugh?

KING. Are you unrepentant?

FEDERICO. Sir, as I am not guilty, I have no need to repent.

KING. Well, if you've already made amends and have married the lady in question, then there is no cause for alarm. It will be a case of elopement, something I cannot condone but can certainly forgive, considering the impetuosity of young love.

FEDERICO. Sir. I do not need to repent or be alarmed because I am innocent of these charges. I have neither kidnapped, eloped with, or married this lady. I arrived from Hungary accompanied by my servants and by nobody else. It's true that I stayed at Alberto's house, but if I ever caught even a glimpse of his sister, may I be struck by lightning at this very

moment. If she has run away from home or been kidnapped by someone, it is not just that I should be held responsible. I was very thankful for Alberto's hospitality, gave many presents to his servants, wished him and his sister all the happiness in the world, and departed having seen neither hide nor hair of her, or indeed without even knowing what her voice sounded like. My sole concern whilst in Hungary was the business Your Majesty graciously entrusted to me and nothing else.

LUDOVICO. He does sound persuasive, sir. It could very well be that, as he says, Alberto's sister had a secret lover and that, while her brother was distracted with Federico's departure, she eloped with him.

FEDERICO. Sir, I swear on the memory of my father and on the name of my noble family that I am innocent.

KING. I am persuaded of your innocence, Federico.

FEDERICO. I am your humble servant.

KING. You must now write to them and deny their allegations. He who is innocent has nothing to fear.

Exit the King.

FEDERICO. Marquis, what should I do?

LUDOVICO. Well, read Alberto's letter and reply to it at once!

FEDERICO. I hate the idea of seeing such an honorable man in this parlous state, but I'll follow your advice. (*Reads*) "I offered you hospitality in my house. I gave you my friendship. You betrayed me. I am on my way to Naples. Prepare to die." Didn't I tell you? His grief has unhinged him.

LUDOVICO. Write to him. Offer all kinds of assurances and explanations. You must make him believe you.

SCENE SEVEN

Enter Florela and Finea.

FINEA. My lady. I can't go on doing this.

FLORELA. Doing what, Celio?

FINEA. Acting as your go-between. It's beneath me. I shall leave Federico's service.

FLORELA. Why? He likes you so.

FINEA. I know he does, but the truth is that, since I arrived at Naples, I'm most unhappy.

FLORELA. Why?

FINEA. *(close to tears)* I don't know. I only know that I am.

FLORELA. How can such a valued servant be unhappy?

FINEA. Because...

FLORELA. Because...?

FINEA. Because I am...

FLORELA. You are...?

FINEA. In love!

FLORELA. In love? With whom?

FINEA. I don't know.

FLORELA. You don't know?

FINEA. No, I don't.

FLORELA. How can that be? I suspect you don't really want to tell me.

FINEA. Well. . . It's a secret!

FLORELA. I know how to keep a secret. Yours will be safe with me. Go on. Tell me.

FINEA. Do you promise not to tell anybody?

FLORELA. I promise.

FINEA. It's a big promise because... because... the lady I love is...

FLORELA. Who?

FINEA. Federico's lady!

FLORELA. Federico's lady! The bastard has another woman! I knew it! Who is she? Tell me this instant!

FINEA. I am loath to reply because...

FLORELA. Because...?

FINEA. Because that lady is right now . . . angry with me.

FLORELA. She? She is angry? . . . Do you mean this instant? Right here? Is it me?

FINEA. Yes, my lady. Don't you know the effect you have on men? Your beauty is such that it can melt snow. I know you do not love me, have not even noticed little insignificant me. If I have dared to declare my hopeless passion, it's only because I am leaving the Count, Naples, the world! I hope you'll find it in your heart to forgive my audacity. But the last thing I wish to do is offend you or betray the Count. By leaving, I shall remain your constant lover and his loyal servant. Please, my lady, don't blame me, blame my eyes, who saw you...

FLORELA. I don't blame you, Celio. Or your beautiful eyes. A young man, like you. . . can't help it. I know. It's happened to me before. I might have been aggrieved if you'd tried to do something about it. But being loved at a respectful distance flatters rather than offends. All women like being loved and admired. But, Celio, as I cannot requite your love, you do well in leaving. I'm sure you'll forget me sooner or later.

FINEA. Forget you? Never! Besides, our love is not actually impossible. You can requite it, Florela, if you wish. All I need to tell you is who I really am.

FLORELA. Who you are...?

FINEA. Yes.

FLORELA. And who are you?

FINEA. I am... a person of a higher rank than the Count himself.

FLORELA. Higher?

FINEA. Much higher! But you must keep it a secret.

FLORELA. It goes without saying.

FINEA. Florela, I am... Please, don't be shocked by my revelation. But I am the son of...

FLORELA. The son of...?

FINEA. King Ferdinand of Aragon!

FLORELA. A prince! An Aragonese prince!

FINEA. Sort of.

FLORELA. But why...?

FINEA. Not even Federico knows my secret.

FLORELA. But why the disguise?

FINEA. That's a good question. And Fabio, my servant, could very well answer it. His real name, which he had to change for obvious reasons, is Marquis don Fernando de Cabrera y Aragon. And mine is Prince Alonso. But let me tell you my story so you may know the cause of my misfortune. Once upon a time, the King of Aragon loved a certain lady, whom he could not marry for a variety of reasons. I was the offspring of this illegitimate liaison! Shortly after my birth, the King married a princess and seven months later gave me a gentle brother. My stepbrother and I were not raised together, since I was not allowed to appear in public. The Queen was a very jealous woman, you see. But then Her Majesty very conveniently died and so the King decided to bring me to the palace from the village where I had been raised in secret, under the care of an ancient knight. The moment I arrived at Court, the Prince, my stepbrother, took an immediate liking to me; and so did the rest of the court, where I soon found myself very much at home. My life became an endless succession of festivities, parties, games and fun, until one day, while I was in a garden, I saw . . . a lady! A beautiful lady who allowed me . . . oh, boundless joy . . . to touch . . . dare I say it? her hand! Unbeknown to me, my stepbrother, the Prince, also fancied this lady, who shamelessly flirted with him, although she really loved me. So much so that one night, while her father was absent on the King's service, she arranged for me to enter . . . her bedchamber! Ah, I wish now I had never yielded to temptation! But I did... I certainly did . . . Several times. Months passed and gradually my beloved began to show signs of . . . of ... harbouring a

fugitive, if you catch my drift. When the time came, in secret, she gave birth to a boy. I went to see my beloved at her hiding place. I saw the boy too. I took him in my arms. Wrapped him up in my cloak and smuggled him out of the house to where I thought my servants were awaiting my orders. Instead, I came face to face with the Prince's men! My wicked stepbrother, having discovered that I seduced the lady he fancied, had carefully planned his revenge. His men drew their swords. I unsheathed mine and, wielding the sword with one hand and the baby with the other, I fended them off, with such good fortune that both I and my son escaped unscathed. The Prince, however, was not satisfied and he thirsted for blood. I became a fugitive. I hid for a couple of days in a friend's house and then I fled on my horse carrying the baby. I arrived at a little village on the skirts of the Pyrenees. I entrusted my son to the care of a plump wet nurse, whom I paid handsomely for the service. I promised her more to come, if she looked after the baby properly until my return. Then I crossed the Pyrenees alone, sped through France all the way to Flanders, and from there, after fighting in a couple of battles, on to Hungary, where I first saw the Count. On several occasions, unseen by him, I witness his extreme courtesy and gentlemanly demeanour. So, when I found out he was returning to his country, I decided to follow him. I feigned a casual encounter on the road and he, chivalrous as ever, offered me both his company and his protection on condition that I became his servant. I accepted, even though it was clearly beneath my dignity and exalted rank to take on such a lowly position. And then . . . then he told me about you . . . and I saw you . . . and I examined your eyes . . . and I forgot my lady love . . . and I forgot my baby . . . and I forgot the Pyrenees . . . and I now declare my endless love for you . . . And yet I know you cannot love me, for you love Federico with your body and soul. And so I must leave . . . although, having confessed my hopeless passion . . . I feel as if I am leaving not just this place, but this world, this life, this universe . . . Before I go, lady of my dreams, know that, if you keep my secret, I solemnly swear, as an honest Aragonese knight, on the cross of this sword, that should Count Federico be unfaithful to you, or untrue to his word, and provided I manage to regain my rightful name and place in society, I shall forthwith send the Marquis Don Bernardo to ask for your hand in marriage . . . for I am dying of love for you, my lady. And since you and your eyes will be responsible for my untimely death, have mercy on me, for to show mercy to the unfortunate can in no way offend the fortunate Count. Farewell!

FLORELA. Don't! Don't go! Wait!

FINEA. What do you want from me?

FLORELA. I want . . . But here comes the Count. I'll tell you later.

Enter Federico.

FEDERICO. Florela! My love!

FLORELA. Federico! What brings you back?

FEDERICO. Light of my eyes, I've returned *unexpectedly* because I've got to show you some letters from Hungary.

FLORELA. They must be bad news. You seem distressed.

FEDERICO. Yes, my love. I am distressed, for they bear very bad news . . . for me.

FLORELA. For you?

FEDERICO. The King of Hungary has written to say that I . . . I have kidnapped my host's sister!

FLORELA. And is that true?

FEDERICO. How can you doubt me? Of course it isn't true. It cannot be true because, as I told you, I have never ever seen that lady, or know the first thing about her.

FLORELA. Where there's smoke . . .

FEDERICO. Florela! Please!

FLORELA. But how can the King of Hungary, no less, accuse you without proof?

FEDERICO. I swear by all that is sacred that I am innocent. You know me.

FLORELA. Yes! And I fear that your love for me vanished the moment you saw that other woman!
Where have you hidden her?

FEDERICO. How can you think such a thing of me? His Majesty believed me and is satisfied that I am innocent. But you . . . you of all people think I am guilty of such a monstrous act?

FLORELA. It confirms my suspicions. Besides, the King doesn't love you the way I do and so cannot feel the pangs of jealousy. But I, who had hoped to wed you, can and do, every single pang!

FEDERICO. I am too upset to reply to you. Please excuse me.

Exit Federico.

FINEA. You shouldn't have pressed poor Federico so hard. Although, I'm sorry to say. . . it's all true. I know for a fact that Alberto's sister, Finea, came with him.

FLORELA. You do? Revenge!!

FINEA. Calm yourself. You shouldn't . . .

FLORELA. But didn't you just say that she came with him?

FINEA. Yes, I did. And if you promise not to become too agitated, or say anything to anybody, I shall show her to you.

FLORELA. Ah, Celio, or should I say Alonso! If you show her to me, I'll be forever grateful! And that perfidious Count will be forever sorry!

FINEA. But you mustn't say a word. My life's at stake.

FLORELA. My lips are sealed.

FINEA. Then, I promise you shall see Finea today.

SCENE EIGHT

Night. Enter Alberto, with a gun, and Lusidoro.

ALBERTO. Any idea of where Federico could have imprisoned my sister?

LUSIDORO. It wouldn't be too difficult to hide her in this city of Naples. Look around you: palaces, villas, gardens, towers. She could be in any of them.

ALBERTO. I'll shoot the bastard on sight.

LUSIDORO. That doesn't seem to me to be an honourable way to avenge your honour, Alberto. You should at least kill him face to face.

ALBERTO. Did he kidnap my sister face to face? He stole her behind my back and I shall shoot him in the back.

LUSIDORO. Wouldn't it be wiser to force him to wed Finea?

ALBERTO. Maybe. But, so what? I'll still shoot him after the wedding.

LUSIDORO. Why don't you complain to his King? I'm sure he'll punish him adequately.

ALBERTO. I want revenge, pure and simple. I don't want to complain to anyone. I don't want him to end up in prison. And I don't want to fight him in a duel. I want to shoot that scoundrel in the back!

LUSIDORO. Someone is leaving his house! I think it's him.

ALBERTO. And two of his servants.

Enter Federico, Finea and Clarín.

FEDERICO. What's the time?

CLARÍN. Midnight. Hardly the right time to pay a visit to Florela.

FEDERICO. Every hour is the right time when one is in love, Clarín.

CLARÍN. Let's go back to bed, sir.

FEDERICO. Love won't allow me to slumber!

CLARÍN. Then, let's bring out our beds and slumber right here in the street.

FEDERICO. Besides, the mendacious reports circulating about me keep me awake at night! To think that I'm accused of the horrendous crime of kidnapping a woman! A woman I've never seen in my life! Damn you, Finea, wherever you are!

FINEA. Don't curse women, sir. How can Finea be held responsible for those terrible allegations?

FEDERICO. Isn't she the cause of them?

FINEA. Yes, but unwittingly.

Alberto points his gun at Federico.

ALBERTO. I'll have my revenge! (*The gun fails to fire.*) Damn the powder!

FEDERICO. Who's that?

FINEA. I'll get them!

Finea draws her sword and runs towards Alberto and Lusidoro. They clash swords briefly, then they flee and Finea chases them.

CLARÍN. Son of a gun! Look at him! How he fights!

FEDERICO. Celio! Come back! Let them go!

Enter Finea.

FINEA. They've fled, the cowards!

FEDERICO. You put the fear of God in them, Celio.

CLARÍN. The way you thrust that weapon of yours! You're a real man, though beardless!

FEDERICO. Who could they be?

CLARÍN. Probably thieves.

FEDERICO. Thieves, Clarín, demand your money and cloak; they don't shoot first.

FINEA. Sir, I think we should move on. They may try to harm you again.

CLARÍN. He's right. Let's go.

FEDERICO. You know what I think? I think that this has something to do with that damned woman, that devil incarnate, Finea.

CLARÍN. Maybe you're right. In which case, let's go home, get some guns and let's find out who those miscreants are.

FEDERICO. Alberto is in Naples. It must be him and his men. Evidently, I can't get out of this mess by just writing and explaining that I'd nothing to do with it.

Exit Federico, thoughtful.

CLARÍN. Do you plan to see Flora tonight?

FINEA. Yes, provided the Count decides to retire.

CLARÍN. She told me that she's eagerly awaiting you at Fenisa's house. But . . . she also said that you don't seem that interested in you-know-what. Is that true?

FINEA. That's only to tease her. To make her . . . want me more and drive her crazy.

CLARÍN. I think she wants it badly enough right now.

FINEA. But is she clean?

CLARÍN. As a hound's tooth.

FINEA. Good smell?

CLARÍN. Divine!

FINEA. I'm not talking about perfume.

CLARÍN. Neither am I!

SCENE NINE

Enter King and Ludovico.

KING. The King of Hungary has written to me again and he's not amused!

LUDOVICO. But it doesn't make sense for Federico to deny it. He could end up married to a very wealthy woman.

KING. I've had it with his pigheadedness! I'll throw him in the dungeon!

LUDOVICO. Without proof?

KING. Ah! But do I need proof?

LUDOVICO. Not really. But the Count swears he's never even seen that woman; and it's a bit much to lock someone up without any cause whatsoever. But now, Sire, it's time to receive the Hungarian gentleman who seeks an audience with you.

KING. Maybe he'll supply the proof.

Enter Alberto.

ALBERTO. Sire, your humble servant.

KING. Welcome to my kingdom. Have you come with an embassy from your King or with a grievance to air?

ALBERTO. A grievance, sir?

KING. I know who you are. And it's with a heavy heart that I see that you, Alberto—if you're indeed Alberto— have come to Naples to seek redress for wrongs committed by one of my subjects. But, as I am nothing but a just king, I need to listen to both parties before I pass

judgment. Not in vain, Alberto, is Justice depicted with a set of scales. Marquis, please ask Federico to come to our presence.

Exit Ludovico.

ALBERTO. I know, sir, that he will not be able to deny the truth of my accusations to my face.

KING. Well, last time I saw him, he persisted in denying he had ever seen your sister.

ALBERTO. Your Majesty may not know that, just before his departure, he earnestly and insistently begged me to give her to him in marriage. And would he, sir, have asked for her hand if he'd never seen her before?

KING. You have a point, Alberto. But let's hear what the Count has to say in his own defence.

Enter Ludovico and Federico.

FEDERICO. Sire, I thank you for not passing judgment before hearing my say.

KING. You are welcome, Federico. But, first, we shall hear Alberto's allegations.

ALBERTO. Your Majesty, sovereign ruler of the great kingdom of Naples, Count Federico, your ambassador to the Court of Hungary, was a guest in my house, the ancestral home of my illustrious and noble family. I served him, if not as well as he deserved as your ambassador, at least as best as I could. And how did he repay my hospitality, poor as it may have been? After his departure, I discovered to my utter horror and consternation, that my sister Finea . . . that angel of modesty, that paragon of Hungarian womanhood, that innocent virgin, timid as a dove, pure as the driven snow; a young girl who had always lived in seclusion, whose principal amusement was her daily prayers, was missing! I communicated my grievous loss to my lord and liege, and he immediately ordered his men to search high and low for my sister. They looked everywhere in the kingdom, they threatened terrible punishments and even death to those who harboured her or knew anything about her fate. But nothing came of it. Nothing except the universal conviction that she had been kidnapped by a traitor, a renegade, a snake called Count Federico. His Majesty the King of Hungary wrote to you expressing his concern, but I, who could not rest for a moment, decided to travel to Naples and make secret inquiries in order to see if I could remedy the parlous state of my honour! But all my enquiries, Your Majesty, have been to no avail. I have managed to discover

nothing. This is why now, as a last resort, I appear before Your Highness to beg for justice against Count Federico!

FEDERICO. Sir, if I may. Alberto should consider that the fact that his sister is missing in no way indicates that I am responsible for her disappearance. In the confusion of my departure, she could have . . .

ALBERTO. Stop! Before you say words you'll regret and my honour will not forget!

FEDERICO. That's not fair! You call me a traitor, a renegade, a snake, and I can't even make a suggestion about your sister? Doesn't it stand to reason that a Hungarian man, someone who had been her suitor for years, took her, rather than me, who had never seen her? That's the truth, Alberto! Accept it or, at least, consider it. Go back to your home, for I assure you that Neapolitan gentlemen do not travel to Hungary to steal ladies, but to carry out the businesses entrusted to them by their sovereign. And I am willing to defend my words here and on the field of honour, if necessary!

ALBERTO. And I to proclaim, here and everywhere, that you're a traitor!

KING. Enough! Remember that you are in the presence of a King. After hearing both parties, my decision is that you'll be allowed to fight for your honour only as a last resort. The burden of proof is on you, Alberto. Show us irrefutable evidence of the Count's guilt before you dare to besmirch his good name on mere suspicions and conjecture.

ALBERTO. I beg Your Majesty's forgiveness. My only wish is to defend my honour.

LUDOVICO. Which is why you must allow Count Federico to defend his.

KING. Well said. Now go, all of you. Produce your proof, Alberto, and I assure you that Federico shall feel the heavy hand of justice.

SCENE TEN

Enter Fenisa chasing Finea.

FENISA. Come here, my honey-bun. Don't be so cruel! How can you refuse me?

FINEA. Fenisa, do what I ask, and I'll love you forever.

FENISA. Tell me what you want and I'll show you some tricks you won't soon forget.

FINEA. But first you must listen. And try to keep your hands to yourself while I am talking! The Count, my master, has asked me to find a pretend girlfriend for him, to make Florela jealous.

FENISA. You men are all rascals! Let me give you a little kiss.

FINEA. Wait! Not yet. Be still for a minute. Florela, you see, made him feel jealous first.

FENISA. But she loves him.

FINEA. That's beside the point. My master felt the pangs of jealousy, and he wants to repay her in kind. Let me tell you our plan. Florela mistakenly believes we've brought with us a certain Hungarian lady called Finea and the Count now wants her to think that it's all true. You, my sugar-lips, are going to pretend to be Finea. Then I'm going to take you to see Florela and you're going to tell her that you are Finea and that you've come to Naples with the Count and that you are head-over-heels in love with him! Will you know how to do all that, my little cup-cake?

FENISA. I think so, but first...

FINEA. First, you do what I ask and then I'll be all yours! But you must promise never to love another man, for I'm very jealous.

FENISA. Since I saw you, there's only one man for me, Celio.

FINEA. Clarín wants me to love Flora, but I'm devoted to you. And surely, there's nothing wrong with you cheating on Clarín.

Clarín enters, listens and reacts to what they say, unseen by them.

FENISA. That scoundrel? I'll cheat on him at the drop of a hat. I've never fancied him. I want you, you and only you! You're my beautiful man! Clarín's a drunk and a chicken. And between you and me . . . he may very well fancy you as much as he fancies me. He swings both ways, you know?

FINEA. I'll deal with him, if he ever tries. But now, let's seal our love with a long kiss!

FENISA. One? I'll give you a thousand!

They kiss. Enter Clarín.

CLARÍN. Ah! You traitors! You're kissing!

FENISA. Why not?

CLARÍN. Why not? I'll teach you to seduce my friend!

Chases Fenisa. Finea defends her.

FINEA. Stop! I'll defend her honour with my life!

CLARÍN. (*Unsheathes a dagger*) Get out of the way, or I'll run you through with my dagger!

FINEA. (*unsheathes her sword*) You dare to threaten me! Here, my weapon is longer! Take this and this!

Finea hits him with her sword. Clarín flees.

FENISA. Ah! What a man! I am in love!

SCENE ELEVEN

Enter Florela, Fenisa and Finea.

FLORELA. So, you are the Hungarian lady who came with the Count.

FENISA. (*adopting a foreign accent*). I am Alberto's sister.

FLORELA. You didn't pay much heed to your brother's honour, did you?

FENISA. Love knows no laws. My very life was at stake, since life without love is like a sunless garden: soon the flowers will wither and die.

FLORELA. Your flowers must then be in full bloom. It didn't take you long to fall in love with him, did it?

FENISA. Did it take you a long time?

FLORELA. I made him wait a full year before I spoke with him.

FENISA. Not all women are as strong as you are. He was staying at my house . . . I saw him every day.

FLORELA. I still find it hard to believe that the Count would repay your brother's hospitality by seducing his sister.

FENISA. Well, he did. He kept sending me flowers, and handwritten notes, and once even a ribbon!

FLORELA. Just as I suspected!

FENISA. He swore to me that he'd never loved another woman.

FLORELA. That may very well be true.

FENISA. I know he lied. He loved you once. But not anymore. When he's with me he tells me I am the love of his life.

FLORELA. Celio! Take this woman away from here! She's killing me!

FINEA. Come with me, Finea. You can continue this conversation another day.

FENISA. As you know now how much I love him, please, madam, stop seeing him in your house. Tell him that he must be true to his word and marry me! Or my brother Alberto will slay him!

FLORELA. That will serve him right!

FINEA. Let's go, Finea.

FENISA (*aside to Finea*) Did I do well?

FINEA. (*aside to her*) Perfect. Better than Finea herself could!

Exeunt Fenisa and Finea.

FLORELA. The bastard! I want revenge!!!

Federico, carrying some flowers, knocks timidly on the door.

FEDERICO. My love, may I enter? (*she turns away from him, seething with anger but silent*). What's the matter, my darling? Are you upset? I hope it's not because of those horrible lies spread by Alberto and his devil of a sister. Allow me to see your beautiful eyes. Don't deprive me of their light, for it will be tantamount to hurtling me to the depths of hell. Don't punish me, my love, for an imagined transgression. I'm innocent. You are the love of my life!

She turns suddenly, grabs the flowers and hits him over the head with them.

FLORELA. You dare bring me flowers? You dare call me the love of your life? You lying scoundrel! I wish I'd never seen you in my life! I suppose you also bring me a ribbon!

FEDERICO. A what? Florela, please stop! You're deceived!

FLORELA. Deceived? Am I really deceived? Do you know, you two-faced ruffian, who has just left this very room?

FEDERICO. Who?

FLORELA. Finea herself!

FEDERICO. Finea? Finea!!!

FLORELA. Yes! The Finea you're going to marry! The Finea that's the love of your life. The Finea you bring flowers to, and send secret little notes, and give ribbons! That Finea.

FEDERICO. Stop, stop, Florela, please! You have really seen Finea?

FLORELA. I have seen her and I have spoken with her!

FEDERICO. I cannot believe it!

FLORELA. Well, believe it, because it's true. As it is true that she begged me, with tears streaming down her cheeks, to persuade you to be true to your promise to marry her!

FEDERICO. You're telling me that you have actually seen and spoken to Alberto's sister, Finea?

FLORELA. Are you hard of hearing? That's right. Finea, the love of your life, that one! Oh, I was so well deceived by you, you...!

FEDERICO. Stop it, please, Florela! Let me gather my wits! The Finea I've never seen in my life was here? And you saw her? No, no, no. That cannot be. This must be the devil himself disguised as Finea . . . to drive me crazy!

FLORELA. Four days! That's all you needed to forget me, to seduce another woman, to promise to marry her, and to bring her to Naples to show me!!

FEDERICO. This is a plot against me, Florela. Please, believe me. You're deceived.

FLORELA. How can my eyes deceive me?

FEDERICO. Oh, I know, I know! This a ruse! You've found someone else. You want to break up with me and you're using this Finea . . .

FLORELA. Is that what you think of me? But let's turn your theory into fact. I am indeed breaking up with you for ever! I don't want to see you again! Get out of my house!

FEDERICO. I will go, but you'll discover sooner or later that I have been wronged by that woman .
.. that Finea with horns!

SCENE TWELVE

Enter King and Marquis Ludovico.

KING. Alberto persists in believing that Count Federico has his sister in his possession.

LUDOVICO. He may be lying.

KING. But what can he gain by his lie?

LUDOVICO. Or he may be deceived. Count Federico is adamant in his denial.

Enter Finea, dressed as a woman, her face covered by a veil, and kneels before the King.

FINEA. Your Majesty will forgive this intrusion, but I am a lady in distress! I am Finea, Alberto's sister, whom Count Federico, under promise of marriage, seduced and took away from her happy home in Hungary. Since then I have been kept a virtual prisoner, hidden away, in disguise, in his house! And now, Sire, he refuses to fulfil the sacred promise he made to me before a crucifix of our Lord and Saviour. I know for a fact that, as all Naples is aware, he wishes to marry another lady, Florela by name.

KING. I know who Florela is. Go on.

FINEA. I beg Your Majesty not to allow him to get away with such a dastardly deed. I know I've transgressed the boundaries of common decency and modesty. But I am a woman, and weak. Thus did Nature make us, according to the Philosopher! I beg Your Majesty: don't allow Federico to marry Florela or anyone else but me, Sire! For if such treachery were to be known in Hungary, my King and my people would all be up in arms against you and the kingdom of Naples.

KING (*aside to Ludovico*) Well, Marquis! What think you now? Is Alberto lying? Or is that snake, Federico, the prevaricator? Off with his head, I say!

LUDOVICO. (*aside*) Show mercy, your Highness. It could be that this woman is dissembling. We don't know her. Maybe she's not Alberto's sister.

KING. (*aside*) Let's find out. Call Alberto to my presence.

Exit Ludovico.

KING. Madam, I have summoned your brother. Please wait here, beside me.

Enter Ludovico and Alberto.

ALBERTO. Your Majesty! The Count is bent on killing me! I'm being shunned and insulted everywhere I go in Naples. And all because of him!

KING. Keep your peace, Alberto. Madam, please uncover yourself and show us your face. Alberto, is this your sister?

ALBERTO. She certainly is! Finea, I want the truth: were you forcibly removed from your home or did you follow Federico, your seducer, willingly? I need to know. Hungary needs to know!

FINEA. Well, you see. . . What happened was that . . .

ALBERTO. Ah! You, perfidious woman! You followed him. You can never trust a woman!

Ludovico restrains him.

LUDOVICO. (*to Finea*) Flee!

Exit Finea. Enter Federico.

FEDERICO. (*to Ludovico*) I heard a commotion. Is anything the matter?

LUDOVICO. (*aside*) Make yourself scarce. The King is very angry with you.

FEDERICO. (*aside*) With me?

LUDOVICO. (*aside*) And I find myself at a loss to excuse your conduct.

FEDERICO. (*aside*) My conduct? (*addresses the King*) My lord, what lies has Alberto been telling about me?

KING. I am very displeased with you, Count. A true gentleman accepts the consequences of his transgressions.

FEDERICO. Sir. If I have not transgressed, how can I accept the consequences? I am innocent!

ALBERTO. Liar!

KING. Marquis . . . Tell him.

LUDOVICO. Finea was here, Federico. His Majesty saw her and spoke with her and Alberto confirmed that it was his sister. She alleges that you brought her to Naples under promise of marriage and that now you're planning to wed another lady.

FEDERICO. What are you saying?

ALBERTO. What is he saying? The truth.

FEDERICO. Sire, you have seen Finea?

KING. With my own eyes. And I must say that I never believed you capable of such wickedness, Federico.

FEDERICO. Sir, may a bolt from the heavens incinerate me if I ever saw that woman, Alberto's sister!

KING. Why do you persist in denying it? Such obduracy! Either you are mad or you are intent on driving all of us mad!

ALBERTO. He's not mad. He's an evildoer!

FEDERICO. All right, all right, Your Majesty! Fine. I believe it! I will believe it! I have to believe it! Everyone says that I have Finea in my house and it must be true. It has to be true, although for the life of me I have no idea how, where, or who she is, for I've never seen her!

KING. It seems obvious that you claim never to have seen her because you plan to break your word. Your intention is to marry Florela and you don't want Alberto to mess things up by forcing you to wed his sister. That much seems clear to us.

ALBERTO. Federico, if the evidence of our senses, our reason, our experience tell us that you have my sister in your possession, why do you still deny it? You've seduced, kidnapped and forcefully confined my sister in your house. You've promised to marry her. To deny it now is not only madness, it is disrespectful to your King, to your friend the Marquis, to me and to yourself!

FEDERICO. Alberto, my senses must be deceiving me! I must be blind, for everyone sees what I cannot see. No doubt I have your sister Finea in my house. I believe it, but please, show her to me! I beg you! And if she says that I have even caught a fleeting glimpse of her, I promise to marry her right now, without delay!

ALBERTO. With Your Majesty's leave, I shall bring her to your presence.

KING. Please, do so, Alberto.

Exit Alberto.

KING. Count, I am proud of you.

FEDERICO. Your Majesty, I have followed the dictates of my fate, not of reason, for I swear to you that I've never seen Finea.

KING. Again?

LUDOVICO. Federico, this is madness.

Exeunt King and Ludovico.

FEDERICO. How can this be happening to me? Could it be? Could it be that I actually saw her, kidnapped her and brought her to Naples . . . and I've forgotten all of it? But I have not the slightest recollection of that woman! Could it be that the King and Ludovico and Alberto are all playing a cruel joke on me? But His Majesty would not consent it! And yet, I cannot see my way through such confusion, such unreason! My senses fail me. My reason betrays me. Am I dreaming? Is this a nightmare from which I'll soon wake up?

Enter Clarín.

CLARÍN. Sir. I heard it all. Congratulations! But may I ask: How did you manage to bring that lady all the way to Naples without my seeing her? What's she like? If you kept her from me, she must be a precious jewel indeed!

FEDERICO. Et tu, Brute?

CLARÍN. What?

FEDERICO. You too, Clarín? Are you also part of the plot to drive me insane?

CLARÍN. I'm only repeating what everyone is saying!

FEDERICO. Everyone? Who? Who's everyone?

CLARÍN. Well. First of all, Florela, who saw Finea crying her eyes out because of you. Then, His Majesty, the King, and also the Marquis, Ludovico, both of whom witnessed her pleas for justice and were moved by her heartrending expressions of grief. Fourth, Alberto, who chased her all the way to Naples and finally found her in the King's palace. Are you telling me that they are all lying? If such eminent people were to tell me that I am a horse, I would

head directly to the nearest stable and stick my nozzle in the trough. Accept once and for all what even the blind can see!

Enter Finea, dressed as a man.

FINEA. Is the Count here?

CLARÍN. Finally, where were you?

FEDERICO. Here I am, Celio.

FINEA. Sir, I desire to congratulate you on your betrothal and wish you all the happiness in the world. I've seen your intended wife, sir, and she's beyond compare! And I hear that she's also noble and extremely rich. You landed a big prize when you seduced her back in Hungary and promised to marry her!

FEDERICO. (*unsheathes his sword*) Do you all want to drive me mad? I swear I'll kill anyone who mentions that woman again!

FINEA. Sir! Please control yourself! I only wanted to wish you happiness!

CLARÍN. Let's get the hell out of here, Celio!

FINEA. Why didn't you tell me he'd lost his mind?

Exeunt Finea and Clarín.

FEDERICO. That's it! I am truly come unglued! I must be really mad when even my own servants mock me! Damn you, Finea, wherever and whoever you are! Are you a ghost? A demon? One of the furies? Why are you bent on destroying me? And yet, and yet . . . So many proofs . . . make me hesitate, make me doubt. Could they all be right and I wrong? But I haven't seen her. I haven't, I haven't. That's the truth. And yet, how could a King be so mistaken? Isn't it more likely that they are all telling the truth and that I, I have actually done everything they accuse me of? Did I meet Alberto's sister in Hungary? I don't remember it, but it must be true. Did I seduce and kidnap her? I have no recollection of it, but it must be true. Did I bring her to Naples and keep her hidden in my house? Indubitably, although I have no memory of it. I, who always prided myself of my rationality, my courtesy, my... Wait a second! I must be bewitched! That's it! That Finea is without doubt a witch and she's put a spell on me! But spell or no spell, I must fulfil the promise that everyone swears I gave to marry her. If I seduced her, though I should remember that much and I don't, then I must do the right

thing and wed her. I'll tell the king that I must have *accidentally* seduced her, and *unbeknownst to me* brought her all the way to Naples, and that I am sorry and I wish to make amends by marrying her. Maybe I will then be able to recover my sanity and be free of these accusations! Every cloud has a silver lining and in my case that will be finally, definitely, inescapably, seeing the face of the woman I must marry whether I like it or not!

Enter the King and Ludovico.

LUDOVICO. (*aside*) Look, sir, he's unsheathed his sword! He plans to commit suicide by falling on it!

KING. (*aside*) Does he hate the idea of marrying Finea that much?

LUDOVICO. (*aside*) Stop him, your majesty! He's a good man and a loyal vassal.

KING. Federico! Have you thought this through? Don't do anything rash.

FEDERICO. What have I done to deserve this punishment?

KING. (*aside to Ludovico*) Take his sword before he does something he might regret.

FEDERICO. I must be mad, sir. My noble father must be spinning in his grave!

KING. (*aside to Ludovico*) See how quickly he alters his train of thought? Sure sign of insanity. Best not to contradict him.

FEDERICO. All right, all right! I'll admit it, Sir. I lied. I lied because I suppose I hoped to marry Florela. It must be true that I have brought Finea with me, that I have her hidden away . . . I don't exactly know where, but I must have. I don't wish to upset your majesty. I will marry Finea, if I can find her, if I can see her. Or even if I can not. It doesn't matter to me any more. I'll marry whomever and whatever your majesty tells me to marry.

KING. Ah Federico! You've finally confessed. I forgive all you've done, all your little peccadillos. Let bygones be bygones. You are doing the right thing, Count. Everyone in the kingdom will rejoice. Give him his sword, Ludovico. And now, my son, go to your house to fetch Finea.

FEDERICO. Sir, I will marry her on the condition that she is brought to me. For how can I fetch someone I've never seen?

KING. But didn't you just say that you brought her with you from Hungary?

FEDERICO. What I said, sir, is that it must be true that I brought her with me, but I've never laid eyes on her.

KING. Enough nonsense! Fetch her immediately or you'll lose your head and end up in my darkest dungeon!

FEDERICO. I will, I will, your majesty. In a little while. I'll go and fetch her, though I don't know where I'll go; but I'll look for her everywhere, though I can't identify her, for I don't know what she looks like. But she'll show up. I'm sure she will. Your Majesty's will be done. I promise to marry that woman . . . whether I like it or not!

Exit Federico.

KING. Marquis, follow him. Don't let him do something crazy.

LUDOVICO. I shall, your majesty. I too fear he might harm himself.

Exit Ludovico and enter Florela.

FLORELA. Your Majesty, I . . .

KING. Stop, Florela. I am very displeased with you.

FLORELA. With me, sire. Why? What have I done?

KING. Do you think it is right to prevent Federico from marrying his Hungarian lady? Is it right to drive the poor man raving mad? Is this worthy of your name, of your father, may he rest in peace?

FLORELA. Sir, I do not wish to prevent Federico from marrying his Hungarian lady.

KING. You do not?

FLORELA. No, sir. I have no desire to marry him.

KING. Well, then, the reprobate lied to me again! He told me you two planned to marry.

FLORELA. Maybe that's his wish; but not mine. He's a bit unhinged, you know?

KING. I tend to agree with you. I've just heard him say he'd never seen Finea before.

FLORELA. He lies. I have seen Finea myself and spoken with her. She proved to me that the Count is a perfidious lover.

KING. Well, now that you're free of the Count, tell me what's your wish.

FLORELA. Sir. I have a great state secret to impart to you.

KING. A state secret, Florela?

FLORELA. Yes, sir. Don Alonso de Aragón, the prince, is in Naples.

KING. Don Alonso? Are you sure?

FLORELA. Absolutely. I speak with him every day. And we are in love! Don't you think my nobility is worthy of an Aragonese prince?

KING. I suppose so, Florela.

FLORELA. We are planning to marry soon, with your majesty's leave. He's asked me to speak with you on his behalf, for without your permission he would not dream of marrying me, even though he's totally besotted.

KING. I rejoice in your good fortune. I hear that he's a handsome youth. I believe I once saw a portrait of him. Where is he now?

FLORELA. Well, sir, as it was important for him to travel incognito, for reasons too long to tell you now, he came to Naples as Count Federico's page.

KING. Is Count Federico involved in this too? That man is tireless! I am coming to the distressing conclusion that he is the greatest trickster and troublemaker in my kingdom!

FLORELA. Federico met him in Hungary, but he doesn't know the prince's true identity. Only I know who he really is. Sir, will you grant us our wish?

KING. I will, Florela. Everything shall be resolved satisfactorily today, just like at the end of every comedy. I will make sure of it, for you will marry your prince and Count Federico will marry Finea or I'll have him beheaded! Could you ask the Marquis Ludovico to come here immediately?

FLORELA. Yes, sir.

Exit Florela.

KING. I would never have believed Federico capable of so many intrigues! He had me completely fooled.

Re-enter Florela with Ludovico.

LUDOVICO. Did Your Majesty wish to see me?

KING. Bring Federico, Alberto and Finea to my presence.

LUDOVICO. At once, your majesty.

Exit Ludovico. Enter Alberto.

ALBERTO. Your Majesty! I fear for my dear sister! I've just spoken with Count Federico. He claims he's happy to marry her. But . . . but he says I must deliver her to him. He alleges he's never seen her in his life, and so cannot marry a non-existent woman. From which I conclude, sir, that he has murdered her! Sir, I demand the right to avenge my poor sister, may she rest in peace! This traitor shall die, sir, and so I am begging your majesty to determine a suitable field of honour where I could end his life in accordance with the rules of chivalry.

KING. Alberto, either your sister is alive or dead. If she's alive, you have Federico's solemn promise to marry her, with which your honour will be satisfied; if she is dead, I assure you that justice will be meted out to him. He will be executed for his crime. You have my word.

ALBERTO. I thank your majesty, but must I wait for the lawyers to debate endlessly before I see justice done? A gentleman between two lawyers is like a canary between two cats. Will not justice be served better and more swiftly if I challenge Federico to a duel?

Enter Federico, Ludovico, Clarín and Finea.

FEDERICO. I accept your challenge, Alberto, with your majesty's leave.

KING. Federico, the whole kingdom is in turmoil because of you. And not just the kingdom of Naples, but also Hungary and, as I have lately heard, the kingdom of Aragón.

FEDERICO. Aragón, sir?

KING. I wish now I had never sent you to Hungary! Instead of peace, your embassy has resulted in confusion at home and conflict abroad.

FEDERICO. Sir, I am willing to face the executioner if I have ever willingly done any disservice to you! But I am such an unfortunate man that, hard as I try to do what's right, everything turns out wrong for me!

KING. Is that right? Well, listen now to Alberto's new allegations against you.

ALBERTO. Sir, I accuse Federico of murdering my sister Finea with malice aforethought! He claims he is willing to marry her but says that he cannot wed a non-existent woman.

FEDERICO. Alberto, as far as I am concerned, she is non-existent. I have no evidence of her reality! I've never seen her, I've never heard her. To me she is as real as Zeus, or rather Medusa. Show her to me, Alberto, and I will marry her instantly. My utmost desire is to serve my King and to restore your lost honour!

ALBERTO. My lost honour, you villain! Here, before your king, I challenge you to a duel to the death, in accordance with the rules of chivalry!

FEDERICO. And I accept it!

KING. And I grant you both your wish. I had enough! Go and kill each other!

ALBERTO. My second will agree on a time and place with your second.

FEDERICO. And my second will eagerly await his visit.

ALBERTO. All right?

FEDERICO. All right!

FLORELA. Excuse me, your majesty. Now that Federico and Alberto's problems have been *satisfactorily* resolved, could we please turn to mine, as promised?

KING. We will, Florela. Where is Don Alonso of Aragon? I wish to welcome him in a proper manner to our kingdom.

FLORELA. (*to Finea*). Celio, step forward. His Majesty wishes to speak to you.

FINEA. At your service, my lord.

KING. Don Alonso. I don't think you need to conceal your identity any longer. You are among friends. I am very pleased to learn that you have decided to marry one of my loyal subjects.

FINEA. I thank you, sire. And I am glad that your majesty is pleased to allow me to marry one of your subjects. But let it be the one that I myself have chosen.

KING. By all means, Alonso. Please let us know who it is.

FINEA. Count Federico.

FEDERICO. (*aside*) Me??? Marry a man??

KING. You and the Count?

FINEA. Yes, my lord.

KING. There you go again, Federico! What new mischief have you caused now?

FEDERICO. (*steps forward*) Sire, I am your loyal subject. Your wish is my command. If, whether I like it or not, I must marry a man, then so be it! (*kneels before the King.*)

FINEA. You won't have to marry a man, Federico. (*takes off her hat and lets her hair fall over her shoulders*). I am Finea, Alberto's sister, who fell in love the moment I set eyes on you. Your Majesty, I am solely responsible for all the confusion and turmoil of the last few days, not Count Federico. Until this moment, he was unaware of my true identity. Please, sire, forgive me. Forgive my daring, for I am a woman in love, and only love prompted and motivated all my actions.

FEDERICO. How could you, Celio... I mean, Finea... do this to me?

KING. Federico, a woman's love excuses all. No need now to examine her reasons.

FLORELA. But what about me, Your Majesty? If I cannot marry a Prince, let me at least marry a Count!

KING. Enough! Listen to me, all of you! This is my will. I forgive Finea and order that, as a reward for her cleverness and resourcefulness, she marries Count Federico. As for you, Florela, it is my wish that you marry Finea's brother, Alberto.

ALBERTO. But, sir, I'd never seen this woman before today!

KING. Well, you never know, Alberto, this could be the beginning of a beautiful and loving relationship.

FLORELA. Here's my hand!

KING. I order you to take it, Alberto, in the name of the King of Hungary.

ALBERTO. Your wish is my command, Your Majesty.

Florela and Alberto growl at each other.

CLARÍN. Is there nobody left for Clarín? No Flora, Florela, Fenisa, Felisa, or Finea for me?

FINEA. Yes, there is. (*Enter Fenisa running*) You will marry Fenisa, Clarín, with the assurance that she's as much a virgin now as she was before she met me.

CLARÍN. I believe you. Grab my hand, Fenisa. (*Addresses the audience*) And this, gentle audience, is the end of this play, whether you like it or not!